UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001204

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/I, STAS

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SUBJECT: DEVELOPING IRAQ'S SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY CAPACITY

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Through a series of meetings over a
week-long visit, senior GOI officials told a visiting USG
delegation from NEA/I and STAS that the GOI lacks a coherent
Science and Technology (S-T) policy development and funding
mechanism, and identified three similar but competing options
that various GOI stakeholders are presently pursuing.  Since
GOI S-T spending is small and unlikely to change dramatically
in the short-term, funds, rather than funding mechanisms,
will likely remain the bottle neck in S-T policy development
and spending.  The Embassy will continue to use the Strategic
Framework Agreement Science and Technology Working Group to
encourage and inform GOI S-T policy development.  End Summary.

Three Options for Future S-T Development
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¶2. (U) From March 7-12, EmbOffs and representatives of the
Iraq Desk (NEA/I) and the Secretary's Science and Technology
Adviser's Office (STAS) met with about thirty key GOI and
Iraqi university officials.  The USG representatives wished
to understand how the GOI intends to develop S-T policy and
fund S-T research.  These meetings were in response to the
report of the S-T roundtable convened by the Department in
Washington, DC, on November 20, 2008 (reftel).  GOI
participants in the meetings identified three competing
options for S-T policy development and research funding.

First Option: Scientific Research Commission
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¶3. (U) Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research
(HESR) Dr. Abd al-Ujayli announced the formation of the
Scientific Research Commission (SRC) in September 2008 (the
SRC was then called the Scientific Research Authority or
SRA).  The SRC is currently part of the HESR Ministry, but
has minimal staffing and funding.  The Minister of HESR said
the SRC, with maturity, could serve within about 5 years as a
national S-T research-funding entity, and the Ministry or the
SRC could develop national S-T policy.  He did not say
whether he prefers the SRC to remain within the Ministry or
to be an independent entity.  Chair of the Council of
Representatives (CoR) Education Committee Dr. Alaa Makki
supports an independent SRC but said establishing an
independent SRC is not politically feasible at this time.  In
time, however, an SRC within the Ministry of HESR could be
the precursor for an independent SRC that funds S-T research.
 (Note: S-T policy development and research funding are
within the purview of Dr. Makki's CoR committee.  End note.)

Second Option: National Academy of Sciences
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¶4. (U) Iraq currently has two national academies of sciences:
the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), founded in 1947 but

tainted by political appointments, and the Iraq National Academy of Sciences (Iraq NAS), founded in November 2003 and composed of prominent Iraqi scientists, some of whom are expatriates.  Neither of these academies is currently functioning effectively.  Dr. Husayn al-Shahristani, the Minister of Oil and President and founding member of the Iraq NAS, told EmbOffs that he has recommended to the Prime Minister that the two academies be merged, a recommendation he says the Prime Minister supports.  Dr. Shahristani said this merged NAS should develop national S-T policy and could serve as a national S-T research-funding entity or, at least, could recommend research projects to be funded.  He admitted Qcould recommend research projects to be funded.  He admitted the creation now of a new independent S-T research-funding entity would be politically difficult.

Third Option: Two Independent Entities
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¶5. (U) Minister of Science and Technology Raid Fahmi said the GOI should have an independent entity to lead national S-T policy development and to coordinate S-T policy implementation and budgeting across the GOI.  He also said the GOI should have another independent entity to fund national S-T research across the GOI, an entity similar in purpose and design to the Iraq Nonproliferation Programs Foundation.  CoR Education Committee Chair Dr. Makki and the Chair of the Education Committee of the Board of Advisors to the Prime Minister (PM), Dr. Saad Ibrahim, support this option.

Comment
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¶6. (SBU) GOI S-T spending is small and unlikely to change dramatically in the short-term given current budget constraints.  This is likely one of the main reasons science policy and funding mechanisms have not received more political attention.  While each GOI official noted Iraq lacks a coherent S-T policy, it was notable that each official also admitted they have been actively working political back-channels to advance their preferred funding solution.  Noting that the three funding options discussed above have many similar characteristics, the GOI should not have significant difficulty finding an acceptable solution.  Thus, funds, rather than funding mechanisms, will likely remain the bottle neck in S-T policy development and spending.  The Embassy will continue to use the Strategic Framework Agreement Science and Technology Working Group to inform and influence GOI S-T policy development.
HILL